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14. ABSTRACT
The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have initiated a flood of scholarly material on irregular warfare, counterinsurgency (COIN), and so-called small wars, and this trend has been furthered within the US military with the revision of several doctrinal publications focusing on irregular warfare. In nearly all literature on COIN, to include tactical directives and other guidance issued by commanders, the population is identified as the center of gravity (COG) for the counterinsurgent. This is incorrect. The proper COG in COIN is government legitimacy. US Joint and service doctrine does not present a unanimous definition of or method for employing the concept of COG except to agree that in order to achieve victory, a belligerent must protect its COG and defeat the opponent's. An examination of the French-Algerian War and the Hukbalahap Insurrection, in addition to the more current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, reinforces the primacy of government legitimacy in COIN. Understanding this forces the counterinsurgent to address the core grievances which motivate the insurgency, while failure to do so results in the misapplication of the elements of national power and eventual defeat. Because of the way in which the US military uses the concept of COG, and because of the absolute requirement for government legitimacy in COIN, it is only proper that legitimacy be identified as the COG in COIN.

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<u>WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?:</u>
<u>THE CENTER OF GRAVITY IN COUNTERINSURGENCY</u>

by

Matthew C. Danner

Major, USMC

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

04 May 2012

Abstract

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have initiated a flood of scholarly material on irregular warfare,

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military with the revision of several doctrinal publications focusing on irregular warfare. In nearly all

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proper COG in COIN is government legitimacy. US Joint and service doctrine does not present a

unanimous definition of or method for employing the concept of COG except to agree that in order to

achieve victory, a belligerent must protect its COG and defeat the opponent's. An examination of the

French-Algerian War and the Hukbalahap Insurrection, in addition to the more current conflicts in

Iraq and Afghanistan, reinforces the primacy of government legitimacy in COIN. Understanding this

forces the counterinsurgent to address the core grievances which motivate the insurgency, while

failure to do so results in the misapplication of the elements of national power and eventual defeat.

Because of the way in which the US military uses the concept of COG, and because of the absolute

requirement for government legitimacy in COIN, it is only proper that legitimacy be identified as the

COG in COIN.

I. **Introduction**

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have initiated a flood of scholarly material on irregular warfare, counterinsurgency (COIN), and so-called small wars in addition to revitalizing interest in older writings on these subjects. This trend has been furthered within the US military with the revision of several doctrinal publications focusing on irregular warfare. In nearly all literature on COIN, to include tactical directives and other guidance issued by commanders, the population is identified as the center of gravity (COG) for the counterinsurgent. For example, this is explicitly stated in the tactical directives for the current as well as the two previous commanding generals of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.[1] As popular as the notion is, however, it is incorrect. The counterinsurgent's true COG is government legitimacy. This will be demonstrated through a brief examination of how US military leadership applies the concept of COG and a review of two case studies.

Legitimacy, as used here, refers to the capacity and willingness of a government to provide expected services to the population it serves. These services will vary depending on cultural factors but generally include physical security, representation in the government, and the administration of justice. They may also include provision of other services such as potable water and public education. Legitimacy is the link between the government and the people, and the method by which rule is maintained in a non-authoritarian state.

The US and her allies have struggled to defeat insurgent forces and build host nation (HN) government capability and capacity in both Iraq and Afghanistan despite the advantages of rapid military actions which quickly defeated the ruling regimes in both nations, the initially high degree of domestic, indigenous, and international support at the onset of each campaign, and the historically unprecedented advantages in military capacity and technology which the US, in particular, has over the enemy. While there are myriad potential causes for the difficulties

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encountered in these campaigns, and it is clear that mistakes have been made at all levels by both civilian and military leaders, misidentification of the COG is at the heart of the failed campaign in Iraq and the impending failure in Afghanistan. Simply put, the US and her allies have focused on protecting and providing for the HN population while defeating insurgents, rather than making protection and enhancement of HN government legitimacy the primary purpose. This strategy cannot succeed in nations which have no tradition of a democratic and open government which exists to serve the people, and no natural inclination to pursue one.

II. **COG Defined**

Before discussing the COG in COIN, it is important to understand the term itself and how it is applied. Perhaps no other single term has generated as much discussion in military circles— and as little consensus—as *center of gravity*.

The term itself, as applied to military operations, is most commonly attributed to the writings of Carl von Clausewitz, Prussian military theorist and author of <u>On War</u>. Clausewitz uses the term in the Newtonian sense and describes it as the point against which applied force will have the greatest effect on a body.[2] Since the 19th century, the term has been vigorously debated by numerous military theorists with the result that even within the US military there is no consensus on its true meaning. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, defines COG simply as "the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act.[3]" Further study of US doctrine, however, reveals that this broad definition can have very different interpretations. Each of the military services has a different view of the concept's meaning and application. Additionally, there is an increasingly popular view that the concept of COG as used today is a

misinterpretation of Clausewitz's original idea, and that it does not apply to irregular warfare at all.

To argue the origin, true meaning, and applicability of the term itself, however, is to miss the point. The ongoing debates are not likely to be resolved anytime soon, and in any case they are irrelevant to the argument here. US leadership has decided that the term applies to all forms of warfare, and that in COIN the COG is the population. The important thing now is to analyze the impact this has had on operations. In other words, what does it drive commanders to do?

Fortunately, this analysis is simplified by the fact that the various schools of thought at least reach consensus on the following point: to achieve victory, a belligerent must protect its own COG while focusing efforts on defeating the opponent's. This presupposes proper analysis of both friendly and enemy COG and, therefore, misidentifying the COG is a fundamental error with far-reaching effects. This error has had a debilitating effect on US COIN efforts.

III. **US experience in insurgency and COIN**

Another term which must be clarified is *insurgency*. This term, too, has received renewed attention in both scholarly and popular works as well as in doctrine. Indeed, it has become such a prevalent topic that one could be forgiven for believing that this form of warfare arose as recently as the mid-20th Century or even later. Rather than clarifying the topic, however, the primary result of this renewed attention has been to disguise the true meaning of insurgency behind a mask of theories, principles, and terms *du jour*.

For many, the term conjures images of a poorly equipped group of fighters who are politically or ideologically motivated (or zealous), organize differently than a conventional military force, and practice unconventional tactics. This may be a fairly accurate description of some insurgent groups, but it doesn't explain what an insurgency actually is. The character of

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any war, which can vary in accordance with circumstances, is not what really defines it. The definition of insurgency in US Joint doctrine is "the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of a governing authority."[4] Simply put, insurgency is an attempt at revolutionary war.

This is significant because, at their heart, revolutions are a social activity, the result of dissatisfaction on the part of a portion of a society with its government. The degree to which revolutions become violent is directly related to the degree to which the state resists implementing the desired changes.

US doctrine recognizes the primarily social nature of insurgency by emphasizing the need to remedy the root causes of an insurgency and not merely defeat the insurgents themselves. Joint Publication (JP) 1-02 defines counterinsurgency as "comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances"[5], and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, specifically identifies the primacy of government legitimacy in COIN.[6] The fact that these ideas are accurately captured in doctrine, however, has not translated into battlefield success.

This situation, however, is nothing new for the US. Western powers, which adhere to the Westphalian notion of war as the province of the state and tend to organize their armies accordingly, have historically struggled with COIN. The US is no exception to this. Despite this repeated frustration, however, it is important to resist the temptation to simply accept the notion that COIN is difficult and the US doesn't have much experience with it, so it should just be avoided. This idea has gained currency as the US seeks ways to justify the overall poor results of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this argument is self-defeating and does not contribute to the betterment of the nation's warfighting capability. First of all, no nation should

expect the luxury of choosing the type of war in which it will be forced to become engaged in order to protect national interests. Furthermore, this argument is simply untrue.

A survey of US history—from the War of Independence, to the Mexican-American War, the Moro War, the Banana Wars, and the Vietnam War—demonstrates that the US has extensive experience in conducting as well as countering insurgency. This is not to mention the campaigns to which the US contributed but did not directly or openly participate, such as the Panamanian Revolution in 1903, the 1953 coup in Iran, the Philippine defeat of the Hukbalahap insurrection following World War II, the Nicaraguan Contra movement throughout the 1980's, the civil war in El Salvador 1980-1992, and the Afghan Mujahideen's resistance to the Soviet invasion, also in the 1980's. These are but a few examples. Although results in some cases varied, it cannot be said that the US lacks experience with insurgency and COIN.

A final point before moving on is the applicability of this discussion to the US. It is difficult to envision the scenario in which the US, itself, is acting as the counterinsurgent. The US role is typically one of support for a third party.[7] Assuming, however, that US involvement in COIN would be in support of a democratic government, as opposed to a dictatorship in which legitimacy is not a genuine concern, then the COG remains the same. HN government legitimacy is the COG for the US, as well, with the subtle difference that legitimacy must exist in the eyes of the US population as well as the HN population.

This becomes clear when one considers cases in which the US has covertly supported non-democratic parties in conducting or countering an insurgency. These operations often fail when the American public becomes aware of them and demands an end to support for a non-legitimate political entity. For example, US assistance to the various Nicaraguan groups resisting the Sandinista government in the 1980's (collectively referred to as *Contras*) was blocked by Congress after numerous reports alleging human rights abuses and exposure that the

Contras were largely funded through the narcotics trade.[8] More recently, US popular support for the war in Afghanistan has rapidly waned not only because of the overall cost of the war, but also because of the Afghan government's perceived lack of legitimacy. Near-continual reports of corruption, human rights violations, and the apparent unwillingness of Afghan security forces to take responsibility for protecting their own population have convinced the majority of American people that the war is not worth fighting any longer.[9]

The current conflicts, though, are too recent and the results too unsettled to adequately demonstrate the point. Therefore, it is instructive to examine earlier counterinsurgency campaigns, ones which have been adequately studied, and for which the full context is now known. Two examples which highlight the criticality of government legitimacy in COIN are the French-Algerian War and the Hukbalahap Insurrection.

These examples bear comparison to both Operation Iraqi Freedom and the conflict in Afghanistan because of the nature of the insurgency itself as well as the initial attempts to counter it. In all of these conflicts, the insurgent force, while militarily much weaker than the counterinsurgent force, was motivated by a well-articulated and highly publicized core ideology which had appeal to a broad spectrum of the population even as the insurgency targeted civil infrastructure. In all cases, the insurgency enjoyed sanctuary outside of the reach of government forces, either in a neighboring country or in a geographically isolated portion of the interior. Also in all cases, the insurgency enjoyed external material and moral support.

The counterinsurgent response was similar in all cases, as well. The initial heavy-handed and monolithic military response belatedly gave way to a more nuanced and comprehensive strategy. In the meantime, however, the neglect of core grievances accompanied by known and alleged abuses of the population, particularly prisoners, undermined government legitimacy. As will be demonstrated, only in the case of the Hukbalahap insurrection was the

government's response appropriate and comprehensive enough to overcome the political ground lost in the initial stages of the conflict.

IV. **The French-Algerian War**

Although there were multiple, sometimes competing groups at any given time, the primary insurgent group in Algeria was the National Liberation Front (FLN), with its armed wing, the National Liberation Army (ALN). The FLN was founded in 1954 and had its roots in various Algerian independence movements which were formed before or during World War II.[10] The FLN military campaign focused on hit-and-run tactics which avoided French military strength. While there were some military targets, a large percentage of effort was put toward creating terror amongst the population at large in order to discourage support for the French government and its army. This campaign featured numerous atrocities, including the kidnapping, torture and murder of both French colonial citizens and ethnic Algerians known or suspected to support the French.[11] In addition to coercing the Algerian population to support the nationalist agenda, FLN political efforts focused on drawing United Nations' attention to the conflict in order to put pressure on the French government to negotiate a cease-fire and grant Algerian self-determination.[12]

The French response to the revolt was slow to start, but by 1956 France had more than 400,000 troops devoted to Algeria. The initial military strategy, known as *quadrillage*, divided the country into military sectors, which were garrisoned by troops responsible for suppressing the rebellion in their respective sectors. This was supplemented by a series of barriers along the Algerian border designed to prevent infiltration from Tunisia and Morocco. This system was effective in reducing FLN activities, but forced the French to devote a large force to static defense.[13] In late 1958, the French army abandoned the quadrillage system in favor of large

search-and-destroy missions targeting FLN strongholds. These operations virtually eliminated remaining FLN military strength in Algeria.[14]

French political efforts focused on deflecting international opposition by highlighting FLN links to communist governments and organizations. The possibility of Algerian self-determination was flatly refused, as indicated by President of the Council of Ministers Pierre Mendes-France's comments to the National Assembly on 12 November, 1954:

> One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and integrity of the Republic. The Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French . . . Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession.[15]

French efforts at addressing the rebels' core grievances were limited to the attempted enforcement of the 1947 Algerian Statute, which increased ethnic Algerian access to government and reorganized departments along the lines of the metropolitan model in place in France. These reforms had not even been popular in 1947 because they were both too radical for the European portion of the population, which favored the status quo, and not progressive enough for the nationalists. The fact that this was the extent to which the French government was willing to go to resolve the underlying socio-political motives for the revolt further undermined its credibility with both portions of the population.[16] Despite its insistence that Algerians were French citizens, and that the country was an integral part of French territory, and not a colony, it became increasingly clear that the French government would always view Algeria as inferior to the domestic departments and not deserving of equal consideration.

Further undermining the French government's reputation, both domestically and abroad, was the high level of brutality which marked the counterinsurgency campaign in all phases, most notably the use of torture against known and suspected FLN members and supporters. Although

publicly denied by the French government at the time, torture and other violent techniques were officially sanctioned and commonly used by army and police forces in Algeria, both of which fell under the command of General Jacques Massu for most of the war.[17]

The strategy employed by the French in Algeria both weakened and strengthened the FLN. Militarily, the FLN were rendered ineffective as individual cells were systematically dismantled or isolated and destroyed. However, the FLN's ideological hold on the Algerian population actually increased at the same time that the organization itself was in a state of decline. The harsh techniques employed by the army to defeat the insurgency, including torture and general mistreatment of the population, combined with the ineffective efforts of the French government resulted in a new solidarity on the part of ethnic Algerians. Even those who were not pro-nationalist became increasingly anti-French throughout the course of the war.[18] Although, both sides of the conflict employed shockingly brutal techniques on a broad scale, the French, as the modern and more powerful nation, were rightfully held to a higher standard by both the Algerians and the domestic French population.

Although the FLN was largely destroyed by 1959, the political tide had irrevocably turned by that time.[19] For France, the Algerian question had expanded from counterinsurgency into a civil war due to the influence of the powerful French Communist Party[20] as well as general opposition to the methods employed by the army in Algeria.[21] Furthermore, France was receiving greater pressure to end the conflict from NATO allies, who were concerned about the fact that nearly half of French military power was tied down in suppressing a colonial revolt.[22]

The French Fourth Republic did not survive this turmoil. In May 1958, a junta of minor political figures and dissident army officers organized a *coup d'etat* and demanded that Charles De Gaulle be named as the head of government. This move was supported by a large portion of the French army, which, with memories of their perceived betrayal in French Indochina still

fresh in their minds, was within hours of executing an operation to seize Paris and forcibly eject

the government when Parliament voted to approve de Gaulle's appointment. Although it was not

the intention of those who had organized the *coup*, de Gaulle's appointment led to a series of

referenda on Algerian independence in 1961 and the conclusion of the Evian Accords in 1962.

Algeria was declared an independent country on July 3, 1962.[23]

V. **The Hukbalahap Insurrection**

Hukbalahap was the name taken by an insurgent group in the Philippines, and it was a

contraction of the Tagalog "Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon," which translates to

"People's Army Against the Japanese."[24] As the name suggests, the group was originally formed

to combat Japanese forces occupying the islands during World War II. The Hukbalahap was the

military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP), which changed the name of the

Hukbalahap in 1950 to reflect the party's post-war agenda of overthrowing the Philippine

government. The new name, in English, was the People's Liberation Army (HMB), but for the

duration of its existence the insurgent force continued to be known as the Hukbalahap, or

"Huk."[25]

The Huk were concentrated in Luzon but had representation on several islands in the

Philippine archipelago. Initial support was very high due to extreme corruption and inefficiency

in the Philippine government and frequent mistreatment of the population at the hands of the

armed forces and police. Huk military activities focused on small-scale raids and ambushes of

government forces as well as kidnapping and intimidation of government officials. Political

activities focused on rallying support within the villages and on maintaining contact with the

communist party in other countries, especially China (PRC).[26]

Although the US provided significant financial and technical support, the defeat of the Hukbalahap is attributed largely to the efforts of Ramon Magsaysay, who served as the Philippine Secretary of Defense from 1950 to 1954, and then as President from 1954 until his death in 1957. Magsaysay's campaign against the Huk focused on whole-of-government reform as well as military action, and under his leadership the Philippine government rapidly gained the support of the people while thoroughly defeating Huk forces in the field.[27]

Within the army, Magsaysay focused on eliminating the high levels of corruption and ineffectiveness which had undermined efforts to defeat the Huk. He insisted that the army, down to the individual soldier, focus first on serving the Philippine people and then on killing or capturing Huk. He personally travelled around the country each day, arriving unannounced at even the most remote outposts to inspect the soldiers and talk to the local population. Ineffective or corrupt officers were relieved and replaced on the spot, and accusations of abuse by soldiers or police were dealt with immediately.[28] Under Magsaysay's leadership, the army became an ally to the people in working to secure their mutual future.

Magsaysay's reorganization of Philippine Army forces included the formation of several Battalion Combat Teams (BCTs), which were much more mobile than the previous army formations. The BCTs were organized to reflect a focus on unconventional tactics and included robust intelligence sections capable of conducting psychological operations, which became a primary component of every operation.[29] With the exception of the intelligence sections, BCTs were regularly rotated between areas. This allowed for the continued gathering of information in each area while also avoiding the ill-will which can sometimes arise between a population and a military force living amongst it for extended periods.[30]

More important than the improvements to military organization and performance, however, were the social, economic, and political changes Magsaysay instituted within the

Philippine government. Although sometimes only modest in scope, these improvements had the collective effect of undermining the Huk political agenda and significantly enhancing popular support for the government.[31] The programs initiated under Magsaysay's leadership were aimed directly at the peasant farmers, who were trapped in an endless debt cycle due to inequitable tax and land distribution laws which strongly favored the minority elite. Government programs extended loans to the peasants, improved irrigation infrastructure, and increased tenants' access to agrarian courts.[32]

One of the most significant portions of agrarian reform was the establishment of the Economic Development Corps (EDCOR). Under this program, nearly 1,000 families were relocated to Mindanao and given their own farms.[33] Although this was only a small percentage of the population, EDCOR had the effect of stealing the "Land for the landless" slogan, a major plank of the PKP platform.[34]

However, the event which more than any other single improvement enhanced government legitimacy in the eyes of the people was the national election of 1951.[35] By both the Huk/PKP and the population at large, this election was expected to be yet another violent and blatantly dishonest event, the latest in a long string of such elections which had served only to highlight the inability of the average person to participate or effect change in the government. The election in 1949, for example, was excessively violent and corrupt even by Philippine standards at the time and had earned the nickname of "the dirty election."[36] To avoid repetition of this in 1951, Magsaysay focused on protecting the balloting sites as well as transport of election materials to tallying centers. He activated the Philippine Army Reserve and even mobilized ROTC cadets to assist in the process.[37] As a result, the 1951 elections were remarkable for their lack of violence and corruption as opposed to previous elections. The effect was devastating to Huk propaganda, which focused on the immediate need for armed struggle

against a government in which it was impossible to participate.[38] This effect was further

enhanced by another relatively peaceful and corruption-free election in 1953. In that year, the

immensely popular Magsaysay was elected President.[39]

By 1954, the Huk were reduced to fewer than 2,000 active guerillas (down from more

than 15,000 at their height in 1950), and their activities were largely limited to gathering food

and other supplies needed merely for survival. More significantly, Huk supporters, which had

numbered more than 250,000 in central Luzon alone in 1949, were reduced to fewer than

30,000.[40] The rapid success the Philippine government achieved versus the Huk was entirely due

to the comprehensive program instituted by Ramon Magsaysay, who focused Philippine efforts

primarily on restoring government legitimacy in addition to attacking the Huk directly.

VI. **Analysis**

These examples illustrate the primacy of government legitimacy in counterinsurgency.

Failure to understand this, as in the French-Algerian example, can have consequences which

render defeat of insurgent military forces irrelevant. Military power and other resources,

however effectively employed at the tactical level, are applied toward the wrong strategic

endstate, and the counterinsurgency will ultimately fail.

The Hukbalahap example, conversely, demonstrates that proper focus on government

legitimacy as the primary source of control over a population enables proper application of the

elements of national power. As discussed earlier, insurgency is an attempt to overthrow or force

change in a government. It is revolutionary war, and while there are many potential underlying

causes for a revolution, none of them are military. Whatever the economic, social, or political

motives the insurgency may have, they are the direct result of failure or perceived failure on the

part of the government. The government is failing to provide something that it is expected to provide. It is viewed as illegitimate.

In COIN, then, to borrow the language used to define COG in US doctrine, legitimacy clearly is "the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act."[41] This thought seems to be captured in doctrine, specifically in FM 3-24, just as the criticality of proper COG identification is clearly identified and well-understood by leaders at all levels. And yet, US leadership insists on identifying the population itself as the COG in COIN. This has crippled US ability to conduct COIN in the recent conflicts.

Manifestations of this error are apparent at all levels, and the results speak for themselves. For example, identification of the population as the COG drives the counterinsurgent to protect the population. This is specifically directed, in fact, in the tactical directives issued by senior commanders in Afghanistan.[42] This is entirely appropriate, but only insofar as it is a function of legitimate government. It is not an end unto itself. Security enforced by a third party does nothing to address core grievances or increase the legitimacy of the HN government. In fact, it worsens the problem because it highlights the inability of HN forces to provide security for their own people. And yet, directly securing the population remained a focus for US and Coalition forces for the entirety of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and it remains so in Afghanistan today, more than ten years following the start of that war.[43]

In some cases it may be necessary for the US to take the lead in securing the population, either locally or in general, during the initial phases of an operation. However, this should be viewed merely as setting conditions for follow-on actions. In most cases, securing the population can be accomplished most easily and efficiently by US forces themselves, while developing indigenous security force capacity and capability is typically slow, expensive, and

frustrating. It is the latter effort, however, which contributes toward achieving the ultimate objective of re-establishing the HN as a self-sufficient state.

In COIN, US military forces should establish security only when strictly necessary, and responsibility for security should be transferred to HN forces as soon as they are capable of taking it. Because it contributes to legitimacy for the HN government, development of HN security forces should be the primary effort for military forces, rather than the also-ran mission it has been in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The most recent Tactical Directive issued by General John Allen, commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF), tells commanders to "partner with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) *whenever possible*. ANSF should be in the lead *wherever possible* [emphasis added]."[44] Why does General Allen need to include this conditional language in a directive issued just after the tenth anniversary of the initiation of this war?   Clearly, development of ANSF has not gotten the attention it needs. Identifying HN government legitimacy as the COG would force the proper prioritization of this effort.

Another example is the provision of essential services, another requirement for a legitimate government. As with establishing security, the US may be required to provide the bulk of material, technical, and financial support in the initial phases of an operation depending on the state of the HN government. However, recognition of HN legitimacy as the COG, rather than the population, will force the devotion of resources toward only those projects which are necessary, executable by the HN with a minimum of overt external support, and sustainable following the departure of the supporting force. While these are indeed principles under current COIN doctrine and directives, they are most often applied as an afterthought rather than as core guidance. The focus is on providing support to the people and not on *how* that support is provided. It is foolish to believe that the people cannot see through rudimentary efforts to "put a

local face" on projects. Furthermore, development projects risk being prioritized for populist or otherwise unsound reasons (corruption), again because of this misplaced focus. As with security, long-term provision of essential services by a third party only highlights the inability or unwillingness of the HN government to provide for its own people. It becomes impossible for the population to view its own government as legitimate.

Of course, the question becomes what to do when the HN government insists on behaving illegitimately. This is an especially common problem in the current campaign in Afghanistan. Despite allowances for cultural norms regarding corruption in government, which differ somewhat from the typical Western view, there remains too high a level of corruption or simple ineffectiveness within some Afghan institutions for that government to be viewed as legitimate by the majority of its citizens. Unfortunately for military leaders, there is little that can be done about this once US forces have been ordered to war. Admittedly, there is no simple solution except to suggest that military commanders must provide civilian policy makers, who can affect the situation, with honest and candid evaluations and advice regarding HN institutions, and that properly focused and unified effort toward bolstering HN government legitimacy might correct some of the symptoms in the mean time.

VII. **Conclusion**

The argument for labeling HN legitimacy as the COG in COIN, rather than the population or popular support, may seem an overly-subtle point, but the difference is much more than academic. This is specifically because of the way in which the concept of COG is applied by US forces. Because the concept of COG is used to identify that which must be most protected from the enemy, identification of the population as the COG drives commanders to resolve the symptoms rather than the core grievances of an insurgency.

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The argument can be reduced to one of the most fundamental truths in COIN: *Why* and *how* are as important as *what*. While identifying the population as the COG might ultimately result in achieving the same intermediate objectives—security, provision of essential services, et cetera—it does not achieve the ultimate objective—a stable HN government, capable of providing for its population and securing its own territory—because it does not drive the pursuit of that objective by the proper ways. Temporarily securing and providing for the population may contribute to the defeat of Insurgency A, but unless the underlying causes of the insurgency are resolved, it is only a matter of time before Insurgency B arises.

Furthermore, the underlying causes of the insurgency may not truly be resolved at all if it is known that a third party, the role the US typically plays in COIN, is the real reason for improvements. The population cannot be expected to view as legitimate, and therefore support, a government which is being propped up by another nation, especially when it is clear that this support will not continue forever.

As with the French in Algeria, failure to recognize and apply these basic principles has contributed to the situation the US now faces in Iraq and Afghanistan. After years of effort, hundreds of billions of dollars, and thousands of lives, the stated objectives for these campaigns remain unmet. In neither case is there a stable government, capable of providing for its citizens and defending its territory without significant support from the US and her allies.

While popular support is a necessary condition for any democratic government, it is important to remember how that support is gained and to what end. The government which is viewed to be legitimate will enjoy the enduring support of the population. Because of the fundamental truths regarding insurgency, and the way in which the US applies the concept of COG, it is proper to indentify government legitimacy as the COG in COIN.

NOTES

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[1] COMISAF Tactical Directive dtd 06 Jul 2009 and issued by Gen Stanley McChrystal states "Gaining and maintaining [popular] support must be our overriding operational imperative—and the ultimate objective of everything we do." The Tactical Directive issued by Gen David Petraeus on 01 Aug 2010 is even more explicit, stating, "We must never forget that the center of gravity in this struggle is the Afghan people." Gen John Allen's Tactical Directive, issued 30 Nov 2011, repeats this statement verbatim. Interestingly, all three of these directives conflict with FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, (co-developed by Gen Petraeus), which on page 1-21 clearly describes the primacy of government legitimacy in COIN.

[2] Echevarria, Antulio J., "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing our Doctrine—Again!," US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2002, 6.

3 U.S. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, CJCS, 8 November 2010 (as amended through 15 March 2012), 44.

[4] Ibid., 161.

[5] Ibid., 77.

[6] U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/USMC 3-33.5, Government Printing Office, 15 December 2006, 1-21.

[7] US support for a foreign government either proactively or during a counterinsurgency is defined as Foreign Internal Defense (FID). FID can include a variety of tasks, including COIN, and is the military component to the HN Internal Defense and Development (IDAD) campaign. These concepts are easily conflated but are clearly discussed in detail in JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, and will not be pursued further here.

[8] House and Senate Select Committees, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair*, 100th Cong., 1st Sess., H. Rpt 100-433/S. Rpt. 100-216, 3.

[9] Elisabeth Bumiller and Allison Kopicki, "Support in U.S. for Afghan War Drops Sharply, Poll Finds," *New York Times*, March 26, 2012.

[10] Alf Andrew Heggoy, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in* Algeria (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), 84.

[11] Ibid., 89-91.

[12] Heggoy, 155.

[13] Alexander Zervoudakis, "*A Case of Successful Pacification: The 584th Bataillon du Train at Bordj se l'Agha (1956-57)*," in *France and the Algerian War 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy*, eds. Martin S. Alexander and J.F.V. Keiger (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 58.

[14] David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria 1956-1958,* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1963), 221.

[15] Heggoy, 80.

[16] Ibid., 81.

[17] Ibid., 234.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 256.

[20] Ibid., 245-254.

[21] Ibid., 237.

[22] Christopher Goldsmith, "*The British Embassy in Paris and the Algerian War: An Uncomfortable Partner?,*" in *France and the Algerian War 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy*, eds. Martin S. Alexander and J.F.V. Keiger (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 160.

[23] Martin Thomas, "*The British Government and the End of French Algeria, 1958-62*," in *France and the Algerian War 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations and* Diplomacy, eds. Martin S. Alexander and J.F.V. Keiger (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 191-194.

[24] Lawrence M. Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines 1946-1955*, (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1986), 15.

[25] Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines,* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 157.

[26] Greenberg, 47.

[27] Ibid., 145.

[28] Ibid., 114.

[29] Ibid., 115.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Kerkvliet, 237.

[32] Ibid., 240.

[33] Greenberg, 89.

[34] Kerkvliet, 239.

[35] Ibid., 237.

[36] Greenberg, 63.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Kerkvliet, 238.

[39] Greenberg, 138.

[40] Ibid., 141.

[41] CJCS, JP 1-02, 44.

[42] For the most recent example see Gen John Allen's *Tactical Directive* dtd 30 Nov, 2011.

[43] Author's personal knowledge based on two tours in OIF and two in OEF, all at the battalion level. This is reinforced by the language in the *Tactical Directives*, as discussed.

[44] Allen, John R. *Tactical Directive,* ISAF, 30 Nov 2011, 2.

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